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Condition of Malta

London

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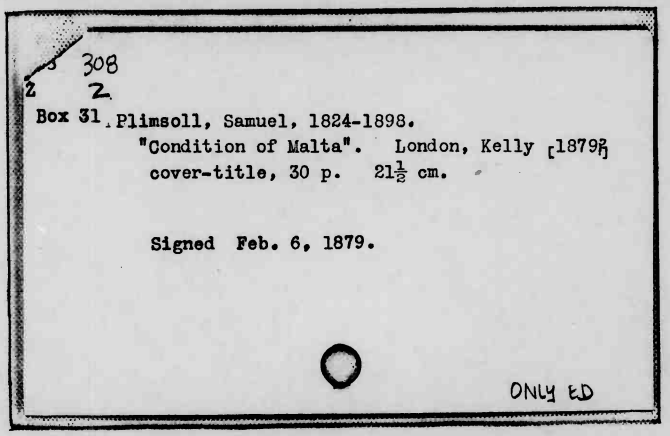

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"CONDITION OF MALTA."

BY

SAMUEL PLIMSOLL, M.P.

LONDON:
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WITH MR. PLIMSOLL'S COMPLIMENTS.

28, Park Lane,
March 11, 1879.

"CONDITION OF MALTA."

To the Editor of the "Times."

SIR,

I arrived here some weeks ago, on my way to India. Circumstances have postponed my further progress until now.

It is not my first visit, by several, but every time one comes the visitor is increasingly impressed with its priceless value to England.

Its so spacious and so strongly fortified harbours, and its impregnable and capacious fortresses, constitute it, even more than Constantinople, the very ganglionic nerve of the Eastern hemisphere.

Apart, therefore, from other considerations, if it can be clearly shown that its sanitary condition is a peril to our troops, who would probably be decimated by the next westward advance of cholera, you will not, I think, deem the matter unworthy of public attention.

The extremely low wages paid, alike to unskilled and to skilled workmen, in connection with the fact that bread and all other vegetable food, which alone

the working classes can get, is dearer here than in London, made me anxious to see how the workmen live, and I shall describe what I saw, in this letter.

As, however, the incredibly insanitary condition in which more, probably, than half the people here live, is the direct and immediate result of the tax on food, I should like to lay before your readers some remarks upon this tax, which are not made hastily, nor without much consideration and careful personal inquiry, more especially as, from some cause, the opponents of the abolition of the bread tax here are very jubilant just now, and the advocates of its abolition are correspondingly depressed. Both parties believe, with what reason I don't know, that the despatch of Sir M. E. Hicks Beach, of May 1878, recommending to the local governing body the reduction of the tax, will be quietly allowed to drop. It may, therefore, be useful that the results of a pains-taking examination of the subject, on the spot, should be made known. I have availed myself largely of the facts gathered with so much pains and patience by Mr. Rowsell, and which were presented to Parliament last Session.

Since my arrival here, the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce has spoken in defence of the taxes on food, and his arguments in favour of these taxes were :—

1st. "That in imposing them, they have been guided by the experience and recommendations of the Royal Commissioners of Inquiry, the late Mr. Austen and his colleague, that distinguished statesman, Sir George Cornewall Lewis." (Loud cheers.)

2ndly. That "what may be perfectly sound policy

on the banks of the Thames, when applied to the most wealthy of all the nations upon the earth, would ill suit the very limited resources of our tiny islands." (Loud cheers.)

3rdly. That, "I am correct in assuring him that fully nine-tenths of the population (hear, hear) of these islands are perfectly well content with our present customs tariff, (applause) and,

4thly. That, "all we wish to ask for is, that the Imperial Government may be so good as to 'let well alone' (cheers) and allow us to collect our revenue as we have done during the last forty years." (Hear, hear.)

As the speaker is, probably, after the Crown Advocate, the strongest opponent of abolition, I propose to discuss the tax briefly on these lines.

As to the first of these statements or arguments, the Royal Commissioners, Mr. Austen and Mr. (not then Sir) G. C. Lewis, made their report forty years ago. They found the wheat tax in existence (it was not abolished in England until nine years afterwards), it was sanctioned by them even then very reluctantly, the Commissioners admitting the grain tax to be "objectionable," and recommending that the tariff be "periodically reviewed" in view of the "variations of commerce and the diminishing expenditure of the Government." They recommended also, that the Government expenditure should be greatly reduced. Both of these recommendations have been altogether ignored. It is highly disingenuous, therefore, to quote the name of Sir G. C. Lewis as approving of these imposts as they now exist.

Now, as to the limited resources of the tiny island. The inhabitants of these islands, 149,270 souls (P. P.

page 11), pay no taxes to the English Treasury, of course. With the exception of 5,000*l.* per annum to the Governor, and 5,000*l.* as military contribution, the expenditure is local, and, indeed, I may say municipal, since the island is so small that if London could be lifted bodily and put down upon it, portions of the suburbs would fall off into the sea, its entire population is about one-thirtieth part that of London; it has one governing and administrative body for the whole place.

This Municipal Council (here called legislative) provides for the administration of the law, and also of justice, manages the water supply, lights the place with gas, appoints, manages and pays the police. constructs and maintains the sewers, paves and repairs the whole of the streets and roads, on which there are no toll bars, cleanses them, waters them; in a word, does all those things and performs all those duties for the whole of the island, which in the United Kingdom are done for all our towns by the various municipal authorities, by means of local rates levied on all the property comprised in the areas administered.

Now, how does the British public fancy the municipal or legislative authority here raises the funds for these purely municipal objects?

Beyond the rents received for property belonging to the municipality, and some seven thousand pounds received as harbour dues, &c., they raise it solely and entirely by taxes on articles of food.

The state of things here is so astonishing, so shocking, I may almost say incredible, that although I do not think my positive statement would be discredited, there would be great reason to fear that I might be thought to be mistaken, unless my statements were supported by evidence. I shall, therefore, quote from the paper presented to Parliament in Session 1878 (No. C. 2,032), price 7*d.*, giving for each quotation the page, and indicating it as P. P.; also from a Report of a Commission appointed by the Governor of Malta, in 1874, to inquire into the causes of the high rate of mortality in the island, indicating it by the letters "M. R." (*Medical Report*), a previous Medical Report by Dr. Ghio; and from a paper on Malta which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*, August, 1878, from the pen of the Special Commissioner sent out here by Lord Carnarvon to inquire into the incidence of the taxes on food.

The total income of the place is 176,002*l.* (P. P. page 11), of which 69,776*l.* is rent, harbour dues, &c., and 106,226*l.* is derived from the taxes on articles of food of all kinds, there are no taxes on articles of clothing, or indeed, on anything else. After enumerating corn stuffs, potatoes, cattle, beer, wine, spirits, olive oil, and vinegar, the Commissioner sent out by Lord Carnarvon, says, in the *Nineteenth Century*, August, 1878, page 285, "these comprise all the articles included in the tariff of Malta, and the income derived from the import duties on them amounts to upwards of 106,000*l.* a-year;" see also official tariff P. P. page 24.

A poll tax would be less iniquitous than this, for this takes more per head from a poor man than from a rich man, and this, too, to pay for many things which are the exclusive possession of the rich.

Hear Mr. C. B. Eynaud, P. P. page 49, "On the

wages of these (the labourers) the duty tells in an upward ratio, whereas the higher we go in the social scale, we find that the per centage dwindles down to a very small fraction."

Mr. Rowsell himself calculates, P. P. page 15, that of the wheat tax alone, "the poor (because they can only get bread in the best of times) pay 10*s.* per head to 5*s.* per head for the middle and upper classes," and of the total taxes, "the larger and poorer classes pay 15*s.* 7*d.* per head, as against 10*s.* 10*d.* per head paid by the upper and middle classes," P. P. page 15. It should be noticed here, that besides the water, lighting, paving, cleansing, repairing, watching, &c., already enumerated as paid for out of these food taxes, the Council have spent more than 100,000*l.* out of these food taxes in building and rebuilding a splendid Opera House, and that they maintain a University for the education of the sons of the upper, noble, and middle classes, at an annual cost to these taxes of 4,399*l.* Admission to all the advantages of this University is charged to the students at 2*s.* 6*d.* per month, and if there are two noble youths there from the same family the charge is 1*s.* 3*d.* per month each. The total amount obtained from fees, it is not surprising, therefore, to find, is 248*l.* 3*s.* 8*d.* only, whilst the food taxes pay 4,399*l.*

Then with regard to water—the aqueduct from the Bengemma Hills is Government property—the water is scarce, so they supply the noble and upper classes for nothing, but charge an enormous sum to others. "It seems that water is supplied from the aqueduct to houses in Valletta and Floriana (the

chief towns) on application and without charges. In the country a charge of 1*s.* 6*d.* a day is made in each case of supply." (P. P. page 17.)

I confess this statement seemed to me so difficult to believe that I made the following memorandum, and called with it upon a gentleman to ask for an explanation. "Water—is it 1*s.* 6*d.* per day per village or per individual?—Is it per day or per year?" The answer was, "It is per day and per individual."

No one will accuse the Commissioner of extreme views when he says (P. P. page 18): "There seems to be no reason why supplies in any case should be made gratis, and I recommend that a fixed annual rate of 10*s.* a year be made on all houses supplied."

I suppose there would not be water enough for all from present sources, even if it were fairly distributed. The commission of medical men appointed by the Governor in 1874, to report on the causes of the high death rate, say that: "The water supply of Malta is simply its collected rainfall; for although additional quantities are brought to Valletta from the Bengemma Hills by the Wignacourt Aqueduct, and to the three cities from Fanara, the advantages are restricted to a very limited area. It (the water supply) is ordinarily stored in cisterns sunk in the solid rock, the interior of which is rendered impervious by hydraulic cement; its quantity, which varies with the season, is always scanty; that used ordinarily is usually derived from the roofs of the dwellings, and is comparatively free from organic impurities."

So we see that the noble, upper and middle

classes have the spring water (seven springs in the Bengemma Hills) conveyed in an aqueduct, the common property, supplied to them for nothing. The Report continues thus: "The tanks which supply the agricultural classes, on the contrary, are filled from the surface overflow of the open highways, the water of which is largely impregnated with foreign impurities." I should think so.

With regard to the University, respecting which the Director of Schools recommended a charge of 20*s.* per month instead of 2*s.* 6*d.*, Mr. Rowsell says (P. P. page 18): "The fees of the University might reasonably be increased as proposed and *per caput*, instead of *per familiam*," and further, "it seems unreasonable not to take steps to bring expenses and fees somewhat more into proportion."

When it is considered that the fees amount to 248*l.*, and the grant for the food taxes to 4,399*l.*, this seems very mild.

I should say that Mr. Rowsell must be a very nice man to live with. Nothing seems to rouse him or to disturb his placid pulses.

The sum of this (the pecuniary part) of the subject we find is, that the nobles and the upper and middle classes pay each 10*s.* 10*d.* per annum, for which they enjoy free water, free lighting, free police, free watching, a magnificent Opera House, freedom from highway rates, freedom from poor-rates, exemption from toll on their excellent roads, University education for 2*s.* 6*d.* per month *per familium*, a subsidised mail service, immunity from taxes on their carriages, horses, dogs, and men-servants, and duty free tobacco, wines, spirits, tea,

coffee, sugar, and all other imports, as all are included in the 10*s.* 10*d.* per annum.

And the poor (and they are as I shall show very poor), pay each man, woman, and child 15*s.* 7*d.* per annum, whilst their share in several of these things is—nothing. Fifteen shillings and seven pence does not seem to English people a large sum, but when you consider the artificial price of bread, dearer here than in London, and the amount of their wages, it is seen to be enormous.

Mr. Rowsell calculates that the bread tax adds to the price of the rotolo loaf, weighing 1lb. 12oz. from a halfpenny to three-fifths of a penny (P. P. page 13), which is equal to more than five farthings on our 4lb. loaf.

Now let us consider the pecuniary ability of the poor and the working classes to meet this impost of 15*s.* 7*d.* per head, and which therefore in all cases has to be multiplied for each man's family by the number of the family. In the P. P., from which I quote, we find that—"In agriculture, men earn from 1*s.* 0½*d.* to 1*s.* 8*d.*, women from 4*d.* to 10*d.* a day, according to the district of the island, and according to the employment." Of course a few earn more, but these also have to live. In P. P. page 40, appendix G, it is stated that: "The mean daily earning of harbour labourers," including in this term ferry boatmen, ballast-men, merchandise boatmen, bum boatmen, fresh water suppliers, coalheavers, grain carriers, porters, wine rackers, oil rackers, wine carriers, cartmen, and grain lifters, is at the present time (1877) 1*s.* 2*d.* a day." It is rather less now owing to the competition for employment, so eager

are they that a steamer can now be coaled in an incredibly short time, at any hour of the night or day. Appendix H (page 41), shows that journeymen carpenters earn from 1*s.* to 1*s.* 8*d.* a day; tinmen, 10*d.* to 1*s.* 8*d.*; bookbinders, 1*s.* 3*d.* to 1*s.* 6*d.*; barbers, and hairdressers, 3*d.* to 1*s.*; stonemasons, 1*s.* 8*d.* to 2*s.* 1*d.*; sempstresses, 6*d.*; washer-women and ironers, 10*d.* to 1*s.*; and cigar makers, of whom there are 2,000, from 1*d.* to 1½*d.* per hundred,"—the Report adding "that a hard working person may make 500 a day." Boatmen average 1*s.* 4*d.*, porters 1*s.*, and carters 10*d.*

I could add numerous extracts from the evidence of witnesses (whose evidence is given in the appendices) which fully confirm this state of things, and it is established also by such inquiries and opportunities for observation as have occurred to me since my arrival.

With the causes of this lowness of wages which have lowered gradually since 1857, when the harbour labourers averaged 2s. 1¾d. a day, as against 1s 2d. now, I do not here concern myself. What I have to do is to show the earnings of patient and hard-working men now, and their total incapacity to bear without the most serious consequences a tax of nearly three halfpence on every 4 lbs. of bread they and their families consume.

On learning the foregoing facts from evidence which could not be doubted it occurred to me that the condition of these people, especially their domestic condition, must be very serious, and having obtained the guidance of a native of the place I went to examine their homes, and judge for myself. My

first visit was to the Manderaggio in Strada San Marco. The entrance was a narrow archway, giving access to a long stone staircase descending to a series of narrow passages not more, in many cases less, than six feet wide, 40 feet below the level of the street, itself one of the lowest in the town (the whole place is underground), and 80 feet below the tops of the houses surrounding these passages. Valletta is built upon a sandstone rock so soft that it is very easily excavated, and yet quite coherent enough to render it safe to excavate large vertical openings or shafts, without danger of the sides caving in, and even to carry lofty erections built nearly, if not quite, close to the openings. It also makes what miners call a good roof (does not fall in). So they dig these pits under the houses nearly, sometimes quite as large as the area intended to be covered by the building. These pits, to which access is given by a common staircase, are then filled with cellars three stories deep, and hundreds upon hundreds of working people live in them (they are in every street—Dr. Ghio's *Report*, Page 31), because of their low rent; 1s. 6d. per month was the rent of the lowest down, and another was 2s. 1d.

These underground cellars, tier below tier, are very small, some not larger than a Manchester omnibus, have bare stone walls, stone floors, stone ceilings, in one of which my felt hat touched the ceiling. They have no fireplace, and therefore no chimneys, and serve singly for a whole family—man, wife, and children. They have no windows, and some have no other aperture of any kind than the door, and when you have reached the bottom of the

well you find the floor, the solid rock, wet with urine and foul with the ordure of the children. So little air reaches the bottom that the floors of the yard or well never dries; and so little light that when you are asked to enter and stand in the doorway it is dark as pitch, and you have to light a wax match to avoid falling down the two or three steps within the doorway. You cannot see if there is anybody in, or where the chair or box used for sitting on is, or the poor bed, in most cases rags laid on boards. The one I saw last night was rags on the more than damp stone, and the smell is so sickening that you can hardly bear it.

In these foul dens, into which no light of Heaven ever penetrates, I saw women heavy with child, who could no more climb to the light of day for fresh air than they could fly across the harbour, and sick people to whom it was alike impossible. The children wet and foul the floors with their urine, &c., and the people (most of them without either shoes or stockings, and very scantily clad) tread it about with their bare feet. The excrement in many of them is put into a box over the sewer, about 20 inches square and high. It goes right down into the untrapped sewer, and there accumulates in the dry season, unmixed with ashes or dust of any kind (for their food being bread, they do not cook; moreover, they have neither fire-places nor chimneys), until the rainy season arrives, when it descends into the harbour.

The *Medical Report*, page 8, says the level of the sewers "is so irregular as to arrest and retain the ordure, which should be ejected; and Dr. Ghio says, page 34, "Into these sewers is received the rainfall

during the rainy season, but *none during the warm half of the year;*" and Dr. Sutherland, page 34, says, "According to my own personal experience the odour from these sewers is most dangerous, if accidentally inhaled. A few hours after such an accident I suffered from severe vomiting, with fever."

Under a handsome building in the Strada Maya Muscetto, a good street fronting the quarantine harbour, measuring (I myself took these and many other dimensions) 47 feet frontage, by a depth of 36 feet, an area of 1,692 feet, there are three stories or tiers of six cellars in each, and in the lowest down alone there are at this moment thirty people living —39 feet below the level of the street. In the whole three tiers of cellars about 80. The yard, or well, is only 11 feet wide, and the length, of course, the same as the frontage, 47 feet. The walls to the sky rise more than 90 feet all round, and its floor is 39 feet to the level where the passage leads to the street. There are three stories of cellars, and five stories above ground. A similar state of things characterises the adjoining building. If a person living in these places is once ill, he or she once down can see no light of Heaven until he or she recovers or dies. I saw one woman (by the aid of a candle) just dying, who had been in total darkness since the beginning of her illness, except that at intervals a lamp was lighted to give her food or medicine; and yet, Sir, these most miserable people are taxed 50 per cent. per head! more than the people who ride in carriages and dress in the last fashion.

I have been in Baldwin's Gardens, in Fulwood's Rents, in Holborn, the blind courts in the south

side of the Old Bailey, and parts of Seven Dials; I found the widows and mothers of drowned seamen in sad places in the waterside alleys in North Shields; I have been in the colliery villages in Wales and Northumberland, the slums of Dublin, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, the mud and reed huts in Southern Russia, and I have also seen where the poor live in some of the worst parts of Palermo, Girghenti, Messina, Taormina, Catania, Syracuse, and other parts of Sicily; I have seen squalor enough, filth enough, darkness enough, misery enough, and nakedness enough, in these places, to make me very sad in the United Kingdom, and wretched in Sicily; but never was I filled with such horror, such loathing, and such panting indignation as when I was in the homes of the poor in this beautiful city in the dominions of our kind-hearted and Christian Queen; for they are taxed and ruled over by British Governors, and, if goaded by the most awful misery and despair they rose upon their oppressors, they would assuredly be stabbed to death by British bayonets, and shot down by British soldiers.

It is well for my credit with your readers that I wanted to find out the death rate of these infernal places. After some enquiry, I was told that the Governor of Malta in 1874, alarmed at the death rate, appointed a commission of six medical men to enquire into and report upon its causes; perhaps it might be found there.

I obtained a copy of that report, and so am able to sustain by unimpeachable evidence my description of these houses, which description I should otherwise *have feared to write*. The medical report made to

the Governor of Malta is signed by all six of the commissioners appointed by him, and is dated October 10th, 1874. In it I find, page 4, that the average death rate of Malta is 38·5 per cent. more than, or above, the death rate for the United Kingdom, not for a short period, but for the preceding ten years. The average death rate for the particular places I have named is not stated, but when we consider that Malta, *per se*, is a very healthy place, it is evident that the death rate of these places underground must be much greater, to send up the average so high.

The death rate which immediately preceded and, indeed, caused the enquiry was 49·24 per 1,000 (page 4). The report speaks of the fact that "the streets, built as they are on steep gradients, are specially liable to receive impurities by percolation from the higher levels," that "the sewers are conducted through a material so absorbent, as readily to become excrement-sodden." Dr. Gulid says (page 8), "so highly charged is the atmosphere of the houses in many of the lower parts of Cospicua with sewer emanations, that all surfaces painted with white lead become at once blackened by the hydrosulphide of ammonium, which is . . . . even when largely diluted with atmospheric air, an active poison." At page 10 we find the statement that "human life can encounter no more deadly poison than air when vitiated by semiputrescent surface empireuma." At page 12 they recommend that "overcrowding should be prevented," and "the sewage of our towns must no longer be suffered to fester within our habitations," and they say also,

with reference to the dangers of the insanitary conditions which . . . . are so rife amongst us, "Dr. Farr has well remarked that to such, a community needs to be aroused by sudden and terrible catastrophes."

In the report by Dr. Ghio on the visitation of cholera in 1865, he says, "Persons who have seen only the best parts of Malta, and have never visited the dwelling-houses inhabited by the lowest and poorest classes, cannot form an adequate notion of their bad hygienic state. There are, indeed, habitations totally deprived of ventilation, the ground-floors and cellars are perpetually imbued with water and sewage" (P. P. 31). Further the "privies (untrapped) commonly open into the staircase or the apartments, and in respect to *ground-floors* and cellars, they open into them directly. The odour from the drains is exceedingly offensive." Dwellings of this sort are to be found in the cities, *and in all the streets of them.* Such, for instance, are those in the Strada Fontana, San Guiseppe, Strada Pozzi, and the Manderaggio, and he (Dr. Ghio) adds, "They are, indeed, unfit for human habitation." This is my evidence. I asked if anything had been done as result of these reports in 1874 and 1865, and was informed that it is expected an Ordinance will before long be submitted to the Council.

Now a few words as to what they eat. It is the commonest thing to hear from the apologists for the bread-tax, "But living is so cheap in Malta." This is undoubtedly true for those whose means are such that only a small portion of them is spent in bread or other vegetable food (I have shown their

immunities already. It is indeed a paradise for the rich, if they are without human sympathy.). But, for the poor, nearly the whole of whose earnings are spent in bread, it is enormously dear; and suppose they try for a cheaper substitute, they are headed off by other taxes.

Bread they cannot always or indeed often find, and so, to protect the revenue, potatoes also are taxed 10*d.* per cantar, 1*d.* per stone, and if they turn to anything else, even the carobs or locusts, the revenue is again protected by a tax, and the price raised accordingly; for the Tariff taxes, as bread stuffs, rye, barley, Indian corn, saggina (whatever that may be, it is something no good, for the Tariff adds), and other inferior grain, pulse and seeds, beans, caravanus, chick peas, kidney beans, lentils. lupins, peas, vetches, carob beans, and catten seed.

Their condition, indeed, is infinitely worse under English rule than ever it was in the history of the island, for up to 1530, when the islands were given by the Emperor Charles V. to the Knights of St. John, they had always enjoyed certain privileges, the fourth of which was "exemption from import duties on wheat or other supplies bought in Sicily." And this was also conceded by the Order, which, however, afterwards violated the letter, but not apparently the spirit of this, as they gave to a corporation the sole right of importing food into the island, they themselves, however, keeping the price down and paying wages in kind.

The abolition of payment of wages in kind, the high duty of 10*s.* per quarter, and, above all, the increase of population, has induced the keenest com-

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petition for employment, and left them so helpless that I doubt if a parallel to their present condition can be found in the world.

This condition of things is the direct, the immediate, and the necessary result of the present system of taxation here, a system supported (unwittingly indeed) by the might of England, but a system, nevertheless, in its consequences characterised, so far as its Malta advocates are concerned, by more cowardly tyranny, incredible meanness, merciless cruelty, grinding oppression, and utter injustice, that disgraces even a Turkish pashalick. In my next and concluding letter, I shall, with your permission, ask your readers to look at some other results of the system.

I closed my last letter by saying I would submit to your readers some other results of this system. This can be most briefly done by giving a few extracts from the *Medical Report* I have referred to. At page 9 it says:—"Food even when sufficient in quantity to satisfy the cravings of hunger, has been wanting in nutrient principles; barley bread, as an article of domestic consumption, has replaced that made from wheat. Rice, potatoes, and even the carob-bean (locust tree) are used to supplement the grain, which has now become so scarce. Abstinence from food for twenty-four hours is no uncommon event; suckling mothers, poorly fed, cannot yield to their offspring the nourishment necessary to support life, and their infants are often left uncared for in the streets or shut up in houses, whilst these are absent at their daily work." Dr. Gulia especially dwells on the number of children who die in the

absence of any effort to save them. "Medical advice," he says, "is often sought only when the preservation of life is almost hopeless, and the moral supineness engendered by poverty has rendered the parent apathetic of consequences."

In P. P. page 46, we find:—"Salvo Attard and Parlo Camillen, second-class land tenants, say 'they employ labourers—occasional labour, men 1*s.* 3*d.* per day, women 8½*d.* The main article of labourers' food is bread of low quality, when they can afford to pay for it; when out of work or work is slack, their food is what they can get, sometimes on cerruba or the sucking of clover." They admit that they have "heard complaints of grain tax;" they themselves would lose by the abolition of tax. Two house painters, a stonemason, and a stone-cutter say they would be gainers if the bread tax were abolished, and add:—"This is the general opinion of all labourers and workmen." Mr. C. B. Eynaud, P. P. page 49, says:—"I am inclined to believe the large number of abject poor and mendicants in Malta is attributable to the high price of bread." "The healthy and strong labourer being only able to keep body and soul together on his daily earnings, when misfortune and sickness come, has no savings to fall back upon, so he and his family become mendicants." He adds (P. P. page 49): "Is it just that only that part of the population least affected by the heavy duty on wheat (I mean the better classes) should be canvassed as to their opinion whether this duty should be continued or not? This question," he says, "throws a fearful responsibility on the higher classes, including the Government officials."

The same gentleman says, after advocating direct taxation, "Some of the most necessary measures passed by Government have met with acrimonious opposition, but were afterwards quietly submitted to, and are now even appreciated. Consequently, in my opinion, a courageous stand should be made by our head man; and I am sure that when once a more equitable taxation is established, the population will learn to appreciate it, for the Maltese are a law-abiding and quiet people, and are not at all wanting in intelligence."

Apap Bologna (P. P. page 49) says "The Bread Tax should be abolished on its own merits."

3rd. As to the audacious assertion that nine-tenths of the people here approve the tax, it should be not 9-10, but $\frac{3}{4}$, as six only out of the eight elected members of Council vote for it; and they, the whole eight, are elected by 2,300 electors only, out of a population of 149,270 souls. The smallness of the number of electors is accounted for by the fact that in addition to a high property qualification they must know English or Italian (why Italian, nobody knows), both these languages being as foreign to the Maltese, who talk Arabic, as German or French to an English mechanic. Imagine an English voter being required to know French! So much for the nine-tenths.

The eight elected members, too, are swamped even on local matters by the nine official members appointed by the Governor, who also has a vote. These vote of course as one man with the Government and repeatedly, even on local and money questions, when the elected members are unanimous, carry the Government proposals against them.

Mr. (now Lord) Cardwell in a despatch dated 19th September, 1864, promised that in questions of expenditure the Government majority should not be used against the elected members, thus giving the latter the power of the purse. This concession has recently been withdrawn in connection with a proposal which was considered essential to the troops; but the first use made of the resumed power was to increase the salary of the Chief Secretary from £1,000 to £1,300 a year, and this was carried in the teeth of the unanimous vote of the elected members, the Secretary's own vote giving the majority of one by which the vote was carried.

Lastly, the English Government is asked by the Maltese upper classes "to let well alone." For all reply I ask is it well? Is it right that the poor ignorant labouring poor should be so heavily burdened, in order that the upper classes may go free? Is it right that the poor starving labourers should be taxed 50 per cent. more than the noble, upper, and middle classes?

I will now briefly consider Mr. Rowsell's proposals and conclude.

Mr. Rowsell says (page 286) "The difficulty of readjusting the incidence of taxes in Malta is as great as the necessity of doing so." And at page 285 "There are no direct taxes in Malta; the cost of street repairs, public works, lighting, watching, is paid out of a common purse" (that is the bread tax); "rates are unknown."

In these circumstances I think an English financier will see no difficulty whatever. What virgin soil is here! A city provided with every-

thing, and rates unknown! Why, a municipal rate of 2*s.* 6*d.* in the pound would more than provide for the whole needed income. And which of the towns in England would not be glad to get off all their local rates for 2*s.* 6*d.* in the pound.

Mr. Rowsell is far too tender and timid in dealing with these people. He speaks of their "hysterical objection" to direct taxes. What nonsense is this? If they want good roads, well-lighted streets, a police, sewers, pavements, &c, things which cost money, why, in the name of common sense and common justice, should they not pay money for them as we do? Who are these few thousands of the upper classes that they should be allowed to grind the cost of these things out of the very life and blood of the rest of the people here?

Mr. Rowsell says, page 286, "No wonder a poor upper class, familiar already with the narrow boundary which divides indigence from destitution, are nervous about any action which may reverse or even modify the disproportionate weight borne by the two sections of society."

If this is not sentimentalism run mad, I don't know what is. Mr. Rowsell has stopped too long in the place, and has come to see many things through Maltese spectacles.

"We are not a conquered people, Sir, we are the allies of England." They talk too of the "Maltese nation!!" *i.e.*, a small portion of the Maltese do.

Now, putting aside the fact that the entire population if put down this afternoon at the London stations could easily find lodgings to-night, and

that they are not equal to more than a fourth of the population of our provincial towns, I say (and this aspect of the subject is worth considering on account of the absurd consideration hitherto yielded to this grotesque sentiment) that Malta never was a nation, tiny and insignificant as it would have been in any case.

It has been the possession of Phœnician, Greek, Carthaginian, Roman, Sicilian, Saracen, Spanish, French, and English; and its present population, each invasion and conquest and change of government, save the last, having killed off its best blood, is the residuum of all (the evidence of which is the pestilent patience born of dense ignorance of three-fourths of them, and the grotesque self-importance of the rest), but chiefly of the Saracen, whose language remains to this day. And if, during the occupation of the Order of St. John, some of its inhabitants chose to parody the titles of Europeans States, is that any reason why we should allow a quarter of the people to prey upon the very life blood of the others? I ask for them all the restoration of the ancient privileges given them by their former rulers, "Exemption from import duties on wheat or other supplies bought elsewhere."

I ask for them all as full consideration as is awarded to 150,000 of the men of Manchester, or Liverpool, or London, and no more. Why should one quarter of the population, and that the wealthiest, be allowed to tax to the very death their fellow-islanders, out of a sickly sentimentality for a few poor parodies of aristocracy, disregarded even here, and by no one cared for but by English Secretaries

of State, who absurdly occupy themselves in settling their claims to precedence over all engaged in commerce.

What would be said if the inhabitants of Sheffield were called upon to provide for all municipal expenditure by a bread-tax.

These "poor upper classes," Mr. Rowsell says, "have an almost hysterical objection" to direct taxes. Well I remember, when I was a child, having an almost "hysterical objection" to taking salts and senna; but I was made to take it, and when my hysterical excitement ran high, it was allayed by a vigorous and quickly repeated application of the palm of my nurse's hand to that portion of my person which is situated below the pelvis. If these people want money's worth, let them pay money for it, and if they can only exist by devouring the poor, in Heaven's name give them a broom apiece, and let them sweep the streets, for the barefooted creatures who now sweep them are infinitely better men.

I have seen, in London, the portraits of the Greek brigands; at Palermo I saw those of Leone and his gang; and I would rather stand with them in the Day of Judgment (if any of us could stand there apart from the atonement of our dear Lord and Saviour) than I would with the men who inflict this terrible injustice, for they ran great risks and showed some courage in securing their booty, and they plundered the rich, while these show no courage and run no risk, but they are robbers from the feeding bottles of helpless infancy, and they filch from mendicants' wallets; for of every shilling you

give to these most miserable creatures one-fourth of it goes perforce to the "poor upper classes."

I have carefully studied every line of Mr. Rowsell's report, and with still greater care examined his proposals, and it seems to me that while, by his ability and patient industry, he has laid a full and complete statement of facts before us, he has failed in his recommendations to deal with this matter with the thoroughness and directness which the case imperatively demands. He has treated the community as if it were a kingdom; whereas it ought to be regarded as a municipality.

Why, I ask, should the 150,000 people of Malta (or rather the very small minority of them who arrogate to themselves to speak for all) be treated with more consideration than an equal number of Englishmen at home? Give them equal consideration, by all means. I see no reason whatever why the "poor upper classes" of this place should have money's worth without payment, than that any other persons should, and still less reason why they should be allowed (sheltered by the might of England) to inflict such frightful suffering and premature death on the greater part of the inhabitants of this place.

It seems to me impossible to question the reasonableness of their paying for lighting, paving, and other purely municipal advantages by a municipal rate.

If this is so, then it will be found that the duties on wines and spirits would alone, without the addition to the former proposed by Mr. Rowsell, provide a far larger amount of income than the extra municipal outlay, of which the chief items are judicial

establishments 13,203*l.*, governor's salary 5,000*l.*, and contribution for defence 5,000*l.*, and leave a very handsome surplus in aid of the municipal expenditure, seeing that at present these duties yield 40,641*l.*, and with Mr. Rowsell's proposed increase of the duty on spirits (to 5*s.* per gallon) would yield 52,141*l.*

This sum is far in excess of probably more than double the cost of all extra municipal expenses. By this I mean beyond the cost of all those things provided for English people by means of local rates. If this is reasonable (and Mr. Rowsell says, P. P., page 21, "whilst all such charges as lighting, watching, paving, and watering, are in all communities defrayed on principle out of local rates, I have not found anything in the conditions of Malta which would warrant an exception being made there,") then, with the exception of the very moderate duty of 5*s.* per gallon on spirits, and the present duties on wines and beer, the whole of the so-called tariff, and the present shipping dues, would be swept away, and Malta declared a "Free Port." This would greatly increase the most profitable employment now enjoyed by the people of the place.

Nor would the local rate need to be a high one. Assuming for the moment that the whole of the present income is needed for what I may call the present dual establishment, we should have to replace:—

	£	s.	d.
Customs dues (abolished)	64,600	8	0
Tonnage and port dues do.	7,496	1	6
In all	£72,096	9	6

But in the duties returned we should, by accepting Mr. Roswell's proposed increase of the duty on spirits, obtain 11,500*l.* Some of his other proposals also seem excellent. For example, he proposes to buy the very low water rent of 10*s.* per house, supplied directly from the aqueduct £600 0 0

Store rents	3,000	0	0
Schools (less than 1-5th their cost per annum)	1,000	0	0
and Stamps	2,500	0	0

in all (each of these proposals is most moderate and unobjectionable) 18,600*l.* This reduces the sum to be provided for to 53,496*l.*

Now, if your readers refer to P. P. page 23, they will find that Mr. Rowsell calculates that a house tax on the house property around the harbours only, and exempting houses under 15*l.* annual value, would produce exactly 1,000*l.* for each penny in the pound imposed; so that a rate of 2*s.* 6*d.* (and what householder in Great Britain would not be glad if his local rates did not exceed 2*s.* 6*d.* in the pound) would produce 30,000*l.* There cannot, therefore, be a shadow of a doubt that if that ratio were extended to the other property in the island, a much larger sum would result than the 23,000*l.*, which is all now needed to fill the hiatus which would be caused by sweeping away the tariff, and making Malta a free port. I believe that, after the first year, 2*s.* would be amply sufficient.

But there is, also, the probable economy which would ensue from the imposition of a rate. At present this small community pays in pensions and retired allowances above 9,257*l.* a-year (fancy Man-

chester paying 40,000*l.* a-year in pensions to retired municipal officers), and when expenditure is advocated, there is much tall talk about being "worthy of the people of this island; the credit of the community; an honour to the place," &c. Once pay these things out of a rate, as they ought to be, and all this will quickly disappear, and the "greatly reduced expenditure by the Government, vainly urged by Sir G. C. Lewis and the Colonial Office for forty years, will come with amazing precipitancy, and a wonderfully reduced expenditure in establishments and salaries will be the result.

The case of Malta is not that of a sick man requiring careful nursing and time for recovery, still less is it that of a moribund; it is that of a strong man bound. For as I know no community so miserably misgoverned, so I know none, so rich in potential and immediately available sources of prosperity. When we drove away the French, we succeeded to all the property of the Order of St John, about one-third of the whole place. This has been treated, not as a prize of war, but as belonging to the people of the island, and is now producing to the public purse, at low rents, more than 30,000*l.* per annum. Mr. Rowsell says, "land readily sells here to pay 3 per cent." So here you have potentially a capital sum of upwards of one million sterling, and no debt to speak of (79,500*l.*, with a per contra of Consols of 32,000*l.*), a portion of this could be used to build houses for the poor, with the view of filling up the horrible pits all over the city. The building would employ for a long time many hundreds of men, the increase of shipping resulting from the

abolition of port dues would employ many more, and so relieve the labour market.

With decent homes to live in, and good employment, the poor here with the lovely climate, would again enjoy some of the prosperity they appear to have had before we came, and allowed the "poor upper classes" to tax them.

I would be the last to speak contemptuously of departed greatness, but in speaking of the Maltese so-called nobility, one is not dealing with greatness at all, either present or past. Sir George Cornewall Lewis, in a letter to Sir Edmund Head, Bart. (*Correspondence, &c., to Various Friends*, Longman, Green, and Co., 1870, page 75) says of them, "There is a pernicious race of nobles who transmit their titles to all their sons, together with fortunes varying from 500*l.* to 40*l.* or 50*l.* a-year, and a self-imposed inability to follow any money-making occupation. These people are ignorant, narrow-minded, stupid, and rapacious of public money, and it would be well if their titles were abolished." He also says,, "He desires a government which looked to improving the condition of the community, and not merely to raising a revenue in order to divide it among English heads of useless departments."

I am not unmindful of the distress which has so long been endured by our countrymen at home, but most deeply sympathise with it; but I do not think that that will render them indifferent to the still greater suffering, so easily remediable, which now permanently afflicts the great majority of the people of this island; and, on the contrary, I believe that the most miserable condition of things here, once

well understood, the country will insist that right be done to the people, and the Government that a source of the greatest danger to our troops be at once removed by a thorough and much needed reform.

I am, Sir, &c.,

SAMUEL PLIMSOLL.

Malta, Feb. 6, 1879.

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